DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 121 053 FL 005 962

AUTHOR Underwood, Gary N.
TITLE What You Sound Like to an Arkansawyer.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 21p.;An earlier version was presented at the annual meeting of the American Dialect Society (Chicago, Illinois, December 27, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *American English; Dialect Studies; *Language Attitudes; *Language Research; Language Usage; *Language Variation; Nonstandard Dialects; *Regional Dialects; Sociolinguistics
IDENTIFIERS *Arkansas; Labov (William)

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the Arkansas Language Survey, which had two purposes: (1) to explore the idea advanced by Labov that Americans generally have negative attitudes about their language, and to see to what extent this applies to Arkansawyers; and (2) to determine how Arkansawyers judge the way other Americans speak English. The twenty-four white adult subjects, chosen randomly among natives of the Arkansas Ozarks region, ranged in age from 29 to 74 years. There were 16 females and 8 males. They were asked to rate each of 10 speakers, heard on a recording, on speech and personality. The ten speech areas included on the tape were: eastern Massachusetts; Charleston, South Carolina; central Kentucky; New York City; Little Rock, Arkansas; Chicago; northeast Arkansas; Alabama; Ozark Arkansas; and Philadelphia. The results showed that the subjects perceived their own Ozark speech as having the most favorable traits. The closely related dialect of northeast Arkansas was the second preference, followed by Coastal Southern English of Alabama. Southern English was seen as more favorable than Northern speech, which in turn was preferred over Black English. Finally, the subjects did not exhibit the linguistic self-hatred postulated by Labov. (CLK)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED121053

Gary N. Underwood

WHAT YOU SOUND LIKE TO AN ARKANSAWYER*

Arkansawyers[1] know all too well what other Americans think of the way Arkansawyers speak the English language. Their language is ridiculed by the mass media, whether through the hick stereotypes in movies and television or the grotesque "humorous" renditionings of Lil Abner, Snuffy Smith, or Ozark Ike in the comic strips. It is alternately laughed at and disparaged by insensitive tourists and newcomers to Arkansas communities. And most disgraceful of all, it is callously condemned by schoolteachers and their textbooks.

Because this situation exists, one purpose of the Arkansas Language Survey[2] has been to investigate whether Arkansawyers have passively acquired the negative self-concepts in regard to their language which American society as a whole has dictated as fitting for them. In other words, do Arkansawyers perceive themselves linguistically in relation to their fellow Americans in the same way other Americans perceive them?

Besides the reason already given, there are two additional motives for studying the subjective reactions of Arkansawyers to their own speech and the speech of other Americans. One is that linguists commonly assume that Americans are generally ashamed of their own language. Over twenty years ago Thomas Pyles described Americans as having a "linguistic inferiority complex" (Pyles 1952:234). But since William Labov first

FL005962

reported (1964) on his study of language attitudes in New York City, it has been more fashionable to describe Americans' attitudes toward their own language as being characterized as linguistic insecurity and self-hatred. In his study of the attitudes of the residents of the Lower East Side of New York City toward their own speech Labov found that his subjects revealed their linguistic self-hatred as one expression of their linguistic insecurity (Labov 1966:489). So strong were these attitudes that Labov described New York City as "a great sink of negative prestige" (1966:489). Labov's New York experiences have led him and his admirers to extend these attitudes--perhaps to a lesser degree--to Americans as a whole. A few examples should suffice. In his description of "a real uniformity in American attitudes toward language" Labov has written:

> ... those who have not had much schooling (and many who have had) form a very low opinion of their own linguistic competence. To the question, 'What do you think of your own speech?' we often obtain such answers as 'Terrible,' 'Horrible,' 'Awfully sloppy,' or 'Not too good' (1970: 3. See also pp. 27, 28, 31, and 32.)

The extent of Labov's influence can be seen in Richard Bailey and Jay Robinson's introduction to Labov's General attitudes toward the speech of New York City, which they reprint in their anthology, Varieties of present-day English. Bailey and Robinson stress the importance of Labov's chapter by saying that

while linguistic self-hatred and insecurity

> may be more intense in New York City than elsewhere ... [they] are nonetheless characteristic of the national devotion to some external norm different from one's own native speech (Bailey and Robinson 1973: 274).

Elsewhere in that same volume Bailey says in a matter-of-fact statement about lower and working class Black students: "Like other Americans, they are likely to be affected by linguistic self-hatred" (Bailey 1973:393). Indeed, Labov's New Yorkers display these characteristics, but whether or not they are truly salient American traits is a moot point. Certainly if any Americans have reasons for these negative self-concepts, Arkansawyers do. Thus, the Arkansas Language Survey aims to test Labov's hypothesis on Arkansawyers.

Second, people like Richard Tucker and Wallace Lambert (1969), not to mention Joey Lee Dillard (1969), have been claiming the existence of a "consensus standard," a standard variety of spoken American English that is recognized by all as the standard for American English. In view of this claim, the Arkansas Language Survey has sought to find out how Arkansawyers judge the way other Americans speak the native tongue.

In the last portion of the Arkansas Language Survey interview each subject is played tape recordings of ten speakers and is asked to rate each speaker on a number of traits using a semantic differential type of scale. The ten speakers on the recording represent the standard variety of English spoken in these areas:

1. Eastern Massachusetts
2. Charleston, South Carolina
3. Central Kentucky
4. New York City
5. Little Rock, Arkansas (Black)
6. Chicago, Illinois
7. Northeast Arkansas
8. Alabama
9. Ozark Arkansas
10. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Admittedly, this selection of speakers is not likely to please anyone because of our sins of commission as well as sins of omission. Certainly the "consensus standard" devotees will find our data inconclusive since none of the ten speakers speaks so-called "network English." That is true. Even if a suitable recording were available, the Arkansas Language Survey has no interest in people's attitudes toward the phony affectations of pronunciation taught in radio announcing courses in trade and technical schools or college speech departments. Likewise, the Arkansas Language Survey wastes no time on reactions to stage dialects of the type presented in the manuals of the Hermans (e.g., Herman and Herman 1947) and familiar to any viewer of American drama productions, movies, or television programs.

For each voice our subjects are provided with a chart listing twelve pairs of traits. First is the heading "My impressions of this person's speech," under which is the

following:

	VERY	QUITE	SLIGHTLY	NEUTRAL	SLIGHTLY	QUITE	VERY	
bad	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	good
sloppy	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	careful
ugly	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	pretty
harsh	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	smooth
awkward	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	graceful
tense	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	relaxed
	VERY	QUITE	SLIGHTLY	NEUTRAL	SLIGHTLY	QUITE	VERY	

Next, is the heading "My impression of this speaker as a person" followed by these features:

	VERY	QUITE	SLIGHTLY	NEUTRAL	SLIGHTLY	QUITE	VERY	
dumb	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	smart
poor	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	rich
unfriendly	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	friendly
country	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	city
lazy	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	energetic
rude	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	polite
	VERY	QUITE	SLIGHTLY	NEUTRAL	SLIGHTLY	QUITE	VERY	

The data for the present study are provided by the responses of twenty-four adult Arkansawyers chosen by a random sampling procedure. All are natives of the Arkansas Ozarks region, and all presently reside in Carroll, Cleburne, and Logan counties. The locations of these counties are shown on Fig. 1.[3] They

range in age from 29 to 74. The least educated of the group (a seventy year old widow) has a fourth grade education; the most educated is a thirty-eight year old school superintendent with a master's degree plus thirty additional hours of graduate credit. Occupations range throughout the scale from the superintendent to a maid in a motel who also draws an AFDC check to support her seven fatherless children. Sixteen are females; eight are males. All are white. Subject profiles are sketched on Table 1.

In analyzing the responses of our subjects, each rating was assigned a number from 1 to 7. For example, "very bad" is assigned a 1, "quite bad" a 2, "slightly bad" a 3, "neutral" a 4, "slightly good" a 5, "quite good" a 6, and "very good" a 7. For each trait the assigned numbers have been totaled and divided by the number of subjects rating that trait to give the average rating for the group. At the present time no statistical analyses have been attempted, and none of the ratings have been correlated with social characteristics of the subjects, although both are to be undertaken once all the data is collected for the entire survey. Since even the average ratings require considerable study before they make any sense, this presentation utilizes a rank ordering of the ratings for quick interpretation. Summaries are provided by Table 2.

For three sets of traits (rich-poor, friendly-unfriendly, and polite-rude) all ten speakers are rated entirely positively or entirely negatively. Not one of the speakers is rated rich,

which is interesting for no other reason than the fact that the 1970 census shows that per capita income in the three counties covered by this study ranges from $1,578 to $1,754. Perhaps in a display of Arkansas graciousness toward strangers, all ten speakers are rated friendly and polite.

If attention is directed to the nine sets of traits which clearly fit on a positive-to-negative continuum, some interesting patterns can be seen. No speaker is consistently rated negatively, but four come close. Three speakers are rated positively only in terms of politeness and friendliness, but remember not one of the ten is rated negatively on those traits. These speakers with just two positive ratings are the New Yorker, the Arkansas Black, and the South Carolinian. In addition, two facts are significant about the rating of the latter two. First, although the South Carolina speaker is white, the Arkansas judges unanimously identify him as a Black. Second, the Arkansas Black and the South Carolina white are ranked either ninth or tenth on seven of nine traits. They are judged to have the most bad, sloppy, ugly, harsh, and awkward voices. These speakers are considered to be the dumbest of the ten, and the South Carolina speaker is also considered to be the rudest. They are tied for seventh on the friendliness scale, the Arkansas Black is eighth on the politeness scale, and the South Carolina white is seventh on the relaxed scale. This obvious negative stereotyping of Blacks is particularly significant since there are almost no Black residents in northwest Arkansas. According to the 1970 census, there are just two Blacks in Carroll County,

one in Cleburne County, and 279 in Logan County. These 282 Blacks among 39,439 residents constitute only 0.7% of the population in the three counties.[4]

In addition to the New Yorker who is rated negatively, another Yankee fares just slightly better. The Chicago speaker is rated negatively on six traits (bad, sloppy, ugly, harsh, awkward, and tense) and neutral on the smart-dumb scale. The third Northern speaker receives a negative rating on just three traits, but those may be surprising to admirers of Eastern New England English. The voice of the speaker from eastern Massachusetts is rated bad, harsh, and tense. In what seem to be inconsistent judgments, the voice is rated neutral in carefulness and gracefulness, but it is still rated slightly pretty.

Two speakers receive just one negative rating each in addition to their otherwise positive ratings. The speaker from Alabama is rated slightly below neutral on the smoothness scale, and the speaker from northeast Arkansas is rated slightly below neutral on the graceful scale. Both scores are less than .11 below the neutral score.

The remaining three voices receive entirely favorable ratings by the judges, and this group contains some surprises. One of the three voices is that of a Philadelphia speaker, and it seems improbable that Ozark judges would rate Philadelphia speech so favorable. Interestingly, the Philadelphia speaker is judged the richest and least friendly of the group and seventh out of the ten in politeness. The other two speakers to be

judged favorably in all nine traits are the speakers from Kentucky and the Arkansas Ozarks.

The composite ranking shows how our Arkansas judges perceive the ten speakers on the basis of all nine traits. The dialect having the most favorable profile of traits is their own Ozark speech, which ranks first on the good, pretty, smooth, friendly, and polite scales. This voice is also ranked second in terms of being careful, graceful, and relaxed. The Ozark speaker is also judged to be the second smartest of the ten.

The speaker rated next most favorably by these judges is the one from Kentucky. In fact, this is the speaker who is rated above the Ozark speaker in the graceful, relaxed, and smart traits.

The third speaker in the rankings is the one from northeastern Arkansas. It should be noted that a consistent pattern is emerging. The two top-rated speakers, though from communities almost 400 miles apart, speak essentially the same dialect, and the speaker from northeastern Arkansas speaks a dialect that differs only slightly from Ozark speech by virtue of some diphthongs and tripthongs common in Coastal Southern but not Ozark English. It is significant that the northeastern Arkansas dialect serves as a bridge between the Ozark dialect most preferred by the judges and the highest-rated speech of an "outsider"--which is Coastal Southern speech from Alabama.

The next four dialects in the ranking are all "Northern,"[5] and the least "Northern"--i.e., the Philadelphia dialect--is the least objectionable. It is perhaps no surprise that east-

ern Massachusetts speech is the least objectionable of the "true" Northern dialects, but who would have thought that Arkansawyers would prefer New York City speech to that of Chicago?

The two voices judged to have the least favorable traits are that of an Arkansas Black and a South Carolinian who is assumed by all the judges to be Black.[6] Thus, the Ozark judges perceive their own speech as having the most favorable traits. Next in preference is the closely-related dialect of northeastern Arkansas, followed by Coastal Southern English from Alabama. Southern English is judged more favorable than Northern English, which is in turn judged more favorable than Black English.

In conclusion, if there is such a thing as a consensus dialect, I doubt seriously if our Arkansas judges share in that judgment. If theirs is to be dismissed as just a minority report, my guess is that other studies would uncover so many more minority reports that the notion of a consensus dialect would be as phony as Nixon's tax returns. More seriously, we must certainly regret the racial prejudice manifested in our judges' objection to Black English. And we may even be disappointed by their disapproval of Yankees. But the most significant discovery of all is this: despite all the prejudice, all the slander, all the abuse, all the ridicule and humiliation and deprecation these people are subjected to because of the way they talk, they do <u>not</u> exhibit any of the linguistic self-hatred which they have every cause to feel. All the claims about this supposedly most American of all language traits--i.e., self-hatred--are just not true for these people.[7] They

display a truly admirable self-confidence and pride. Surely, this healthy positive image of themselves, which is rooted in a set of beliefs and values as tough and enduring as those rugged old Ozark hills, is a quality we all must admire. We linguists and educators would do well if we would stop trying to change the way people talk and instead re-inforce this kind of linguistic self-esteem while developing tolerance for others.

Gary N. Underwood The University of Texas at Austin

NOTES

*An earlier version of this paper was read at the annual meeting of the American Dialect Society, December 27, 1973, in Chicago.

[1] The debate over whether people from Arkansas are Arkansans or Arkansawyers has raged in the state for well over a hundred years. My friend, Vance Randolph, the distinguished Ozark folklorist, says that an Arkansan is a person who needs a dictionary to know what to call himself. Like Mr. Randolph, I prefer the name Arkansawyer.

[2] The rationale for this survey are best stated in Underwood (1973); a description of the research methodology can be found in Underwood (1972).

[3] Some relevant data about the three counties are as follows:

Carroll County. Population: 12, 301 (100% rural). Per capita income: $1,666. Racial composition: 12,275 whites; 2 blacks; 24 other. Carroll County is mountaneous (1,200 to 2,100 feet), situated in the heart of the Ozarks. Over 600 springs are in the county, and the town of Eureka Springs is one of the older tourest centers in Arkansas, dating back to the 1880's. Water is bottled in Eureka Springs and shipped throughout the U. S. for sale. Industries in the towns of Berryville and Green Forest include cheese and poultry processing and garment manufactoring.

Cleburne County. Population: 10,349 (100% rural). Per capita income: $1,754. Racial composition: 10,335 whites; 1 black; 13

other. Cleburne County is in the rolling hill country of the eastern Ozarks. Seven springs have made Heber Springs a popular watering place since about 1850. The creation of Greers Ferry Lake (40,500 acres) by damming the Little Red and Middle Fork rivers has stimulated resort development in recent years.

Logan County. Population: 16,789 (59% rural). Per capita income: $1,578. Racial composition: 16, 471 whites; 279 blacks; 39 other. Mt. Magazine (2,823 feet), the highest mountain between the Alleghenies and the Rockies, divides the county into two farming areas, the Arkansas River Valley to the North and the Petit Jean Valley to the South. Although many farms still have cotton allotments, cotton farming has waned with farmers turning to cattle, general and truck farming. Several small factories are located in Booneville and Paris. Natural gas and bituminous coal are found in the county.

[4] Data here, as well as in note 3, are from U. S. Bureau of the Census (1973).

[5] I place Northern in quotation marks since American linguistic geographers traditionally identify Philadelphia speech as North Midland. But as far as Arkansawyers are concerned, Pennsylvania is Northern, and Pennsylvania speech is also Northern (in contrast to the Arkansawyers' self-identification of themselves and their speech as Southern).

[6] After the listeners mark the evaluation form for each speaker, we ask them if they can identify the race of the

speaker. The subjects in this study did not wait to be asked about these two speakers but usually told us in no uncertain terms the race of the speakers--black. They often told us a great deal more about them, which was not recorded.

[7] If these generalizations about Americans' linguistic self-hatred and insecurity, which have been made largely on the basis of Labov's study of New Yorkers, are invalid, how many of the other generalizations about Americans which have been extended from Labov's research are also hasty and unwarranted?

TABLE 1

PROFILES OF SUBJECTS

S[1]	A[2]	C[3]	R[4]	E[5]	O[6]	SC[7]
F	70	Ca	RNF	4	Housewife (widow)	LL
F	51	Ca	RNF	7	Maid in a motel, receives A. F. D. C. checks	LL
F	74	Ca	RNF	12	Housewife S: Teacher, farmer (retired)	LM
F	44	Ca	RNF	BA	Multi-media director in public schools	UM
M	56	Ca	RNF	9	Service station owner	UL
F	36	Ca	RNF	12	Laboratory technician S: Painter, carpenter	UL
F	57	Ca	RNF	8	Housewife S: Grocery store clerk	UL
M	34	Ca	RNF	12	Supervisor in a poultry processing plant	UM
F	51	Cl	RF	10	Housewife S: Farmer, sawmill operator	LM
F	29	Cl	RF	11	Housewife, garment worker S: Equipment operator	UL
F	73	Cl	RF	8	Housewife S: Farmer, general merchant	LM
M	38	Cl	RF	MS+	School superintendent	UM
F	71	Cl	RNF	8	Housewife S: Farmer	LM
M	38	Cl	RF	8	Hatchery worker	LL
F	63	Cl	RF	6	Housewife S: Farmer, factory worker, timber cutter	LL
F	42	Cl	RNF	8	Housewife S: Highway department maintenance worker	LL
F	59	Lo	U	12	Secretary	UL
F	29	Lo	RF	12	Housewife, insurance clerk in doctor's office S: Farmer	LM
M	68	Lo	U	8	Mechanic (retired)	UL
M	47	Lo	U	12	Army sergeant (retired), self-employed radio repairman	LM
F	72	Lo	RF	12	Housewife, former teacher S: Farmer	LM

TABLE 1

(cont.)

S	A	C	R	E	O	SC
M	40	Lo	RF	BS	Farmer	LM
F	73	Lo	RF	8	Housewife S: Farmer	LM
M	35	Lo	RNF	12	Highway department maintenance worker	UL

1
Sex

2
Age

3
County (Ca = Carroll, Cl = Cleburne, Lo = Logan)

4
Residence (RNF = rural non-farm, RF = rural farm, U = urban)

5
Education

6
Occupation (S = spouse)

7
Social class as determined by the ranking designed by McGuire and White (1955) (LL = lower lower, UL = upper lower, LM = lower middle, UM = upper middle)

TABLE 2

RANK ORDER OF SPEAKERS

good	9	3	10	8	7	{1,4}		6	2	5	bad
careful	3	9	10	1	{7,8}		6	4	5	2	sloppy
pretty	9	1	7	3	8	10	{4,6}		5	2	ugly
smooth	9	7	3	10	{1,4}		8	6	5	2	harsh
graceful	3	9	10	1	8	7	6	4	2	5	awkward
relaxed	3	9	10	8	4	7	2	1	6	5	tense
smart	3	9	10	7	1	8	6	4	2	5	dumb
friendly	9	8	3	7	{1,6}			{4,2,5}		10	unfriendly
polite	9	8	3	7	6	1	10	5	4	2	rude
TOTAL	9	3	7	8	10	1	4	6	2	5	

IDENTIFICATION OF SPEAKERS:

1. Massachusetts
2. South Carolina
3. Kentucky
4. New York
5. Arkansas (Black)
6. Illinois
7. Arkansas (Northeast)
8. Alabama
9. Arkansas (Ozarks)
10. Pennsylvania

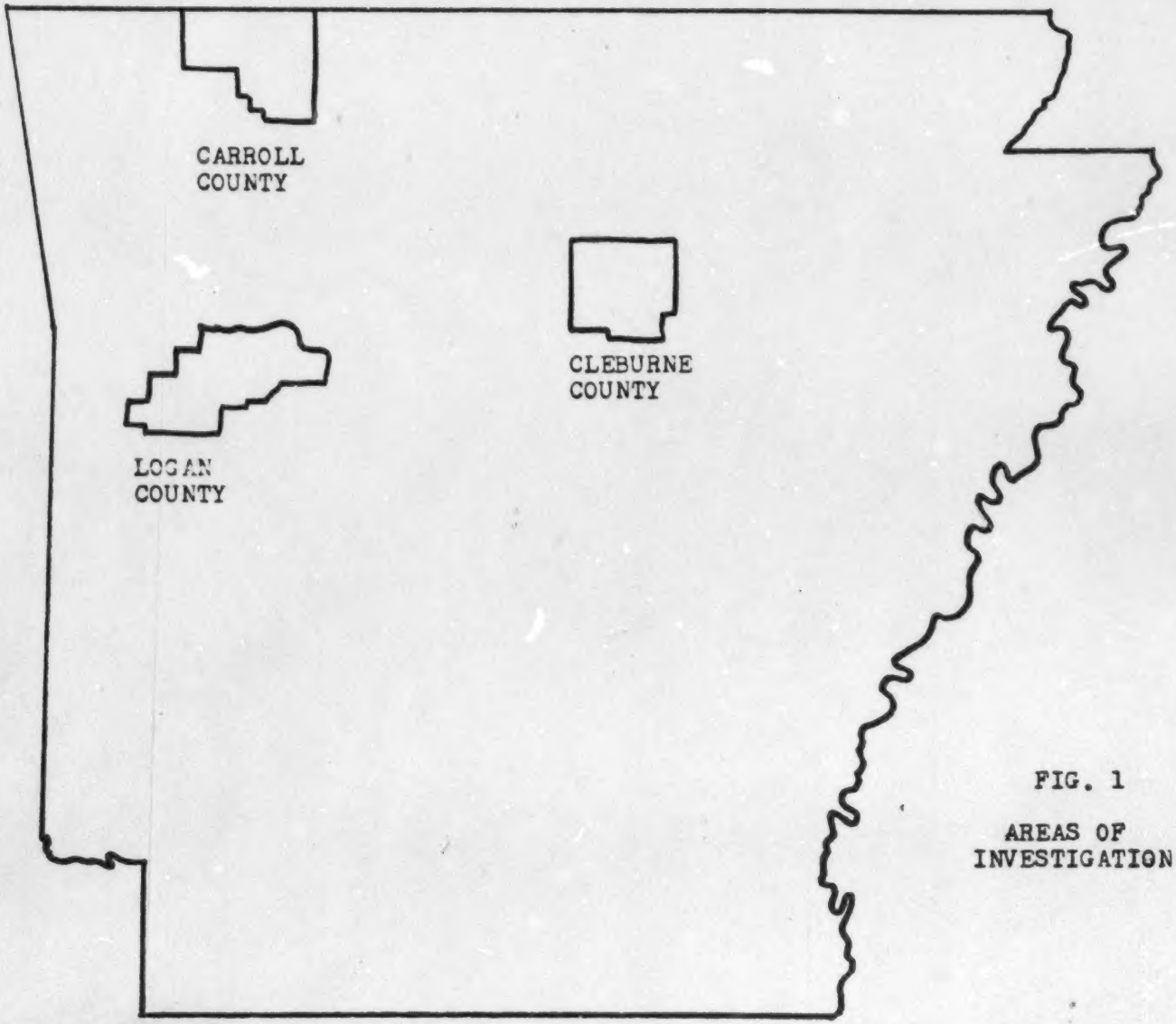

FIG. 1

AREAS OF
INVESTIGATION

REFERENCES

Bailey, Richard W. 1973. Write off vs. write on: dialects and the teaching of composition. In Bailey and Robinson 1973, 384-408.

Bailey, Richard W., and Jay L. Robinson, eds. 1973. Varieties of present-day English. New York: Macmillan.

Dillard, Joey L. 1969. How to tell the bandits from the good guys or, what dialect to teach? FFLR 7:1.84-85, 162.

Herman, Lewis H., and Marguerite S. 1947. Manual of American dialects, for radio, stage, screen, and television. New York: Theatre Arts Books.

Labov, William. 1964. Stages in the acquisition of standard English. Social dialects and language learning, ed. by Roger W. Shuy, 77-103. Champaign: National Council of Teachers of English.

Labov, William. 1966. The social stratification of English in New York City. Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Labov, William. 1970. The study of nonstandard English. Champaign: National Council of Teachers of English.

McGuire, Carson, and George D. White. 1955. The estimation of social status. Research paper in human development no. 3 (revised). Austin: Department of Educational Psychology, University of Texas.

Pyles, Thomas. 1952. Words and ways of American English. New York: Random House.

Tucker, G. Richard, and Wallace E. Lambert. 1969. White and Negro listeners' reactions to various American English dialects. Social forces 47.463-468.

Underwood, Gary N. 1972. The research methods of the Arkansas Language Survey. Paper read at the International Conference on Methods in Dialectology, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, July 25. ERIC ED 074 823.

Underwood, Gary N. 1973. Problems in the study of Arkansas dialects. Orbis 22.64-71.

U. S. Bureau of the Census. 1973. Census of population 1970. Vol. 1 Characteristics of the population. Part 5 Arkansas. Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office.